



## Frederick County Local Care Team

### Voluntary Placement Agreement Information Packet

#### What is a Voluntary Placement Agreement?

A Voluntary Placement Agreement (VPA) is used to access residential treatment options for children with a documented developmental disability or mental illness when treatment needs cannot be met within the community or with home-based intervention and the parent needs funding assistance.

#### Types of Placement structures under a Voluntary Placement Agreement:

There are three types of placement structures eligible for a VPA: Residential Treatment Centers, Diagnostic Centers, and Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) Residential Programs:

### Residential Treatment Center (RTC)

An RTC is the highest level of care available through a VPA. They are locked facilities which include intensive evaluation and treatment for youth with severe behavioral challenges. They are most appropriate for youth with emotional disabilities and do not typically serve youth with developmental disabilities.

### Diagnostic Center

A Diagnostic Center is a 90-day facility designed to clarify a child's mental health diagnosis, stabilize them on medication, and create detailed recommendations for continued treatment. Recommendations upon completion of a Diagnostic Center could include placement in a higher level of care (RTC), or discharge home. A Local Care Team (LCT) meeting can assist in connecting the family to community resources.

### DDA Residential Program

DDA Residential programs range from community-based programs and intensive residential habilitation programs. They are designed to serve youth with cognitive and/or developmental disabilities who have intensive behavioral needs that are not able to be met in the home.

**Criteria for each placement Structure under a Voluntary Placement Agreement:**

Seeking a Residential Treatment  
(RTC)



and

My child meets medical necessity criteria (a psychiatric evaluation was done within the last 30 days, which states that my child needs RTC level of care).



and

My child has private insurance



then

Call insurance to see if treatment in an RTC is covered. Your insurance company will help you locate an RTC that is in your network.



then

If your policy covers treatment in an RTC and your child is denied by the insurance company, appeal the decision.



then

If your insurance does not cover the RTC or you cannot cover the educational costs of the placement, call Frederick County Department of Social Services (FCDSS) at 301.600.4555 to request a VPA.

NOTE: If your child has an IEP with a non-public school placement, MD State Department of Education (MDSE) may cover educational costs, depending on the RTC.



and

My child has public insurance (Medicaid)



and

My child has an IEP with a non-public school placement OR my child is under the age of 13



then

Your child's mental health provider can assist you with referrals to RTCs. Call your Local Core Service Agency at 301.600.1029 for additional information.



and

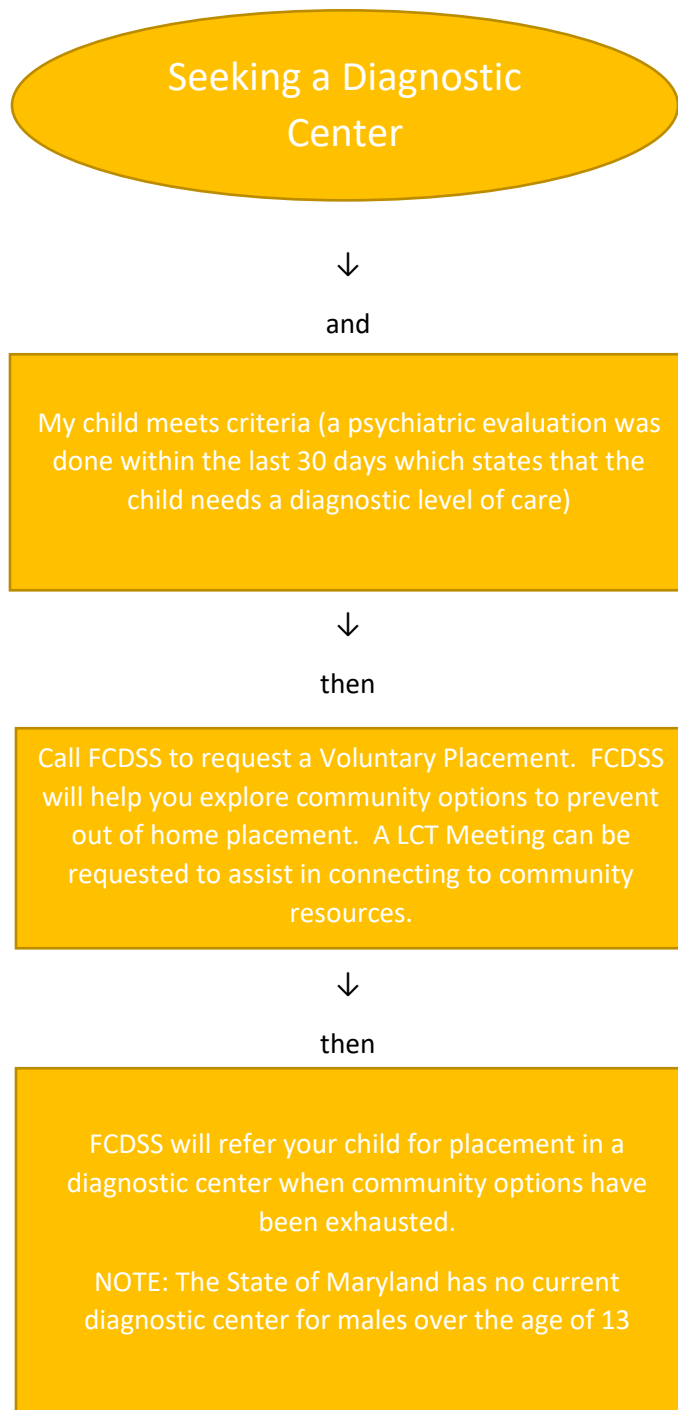
My child does not have an IEP with a non-public school placement and is 13 yrs. +



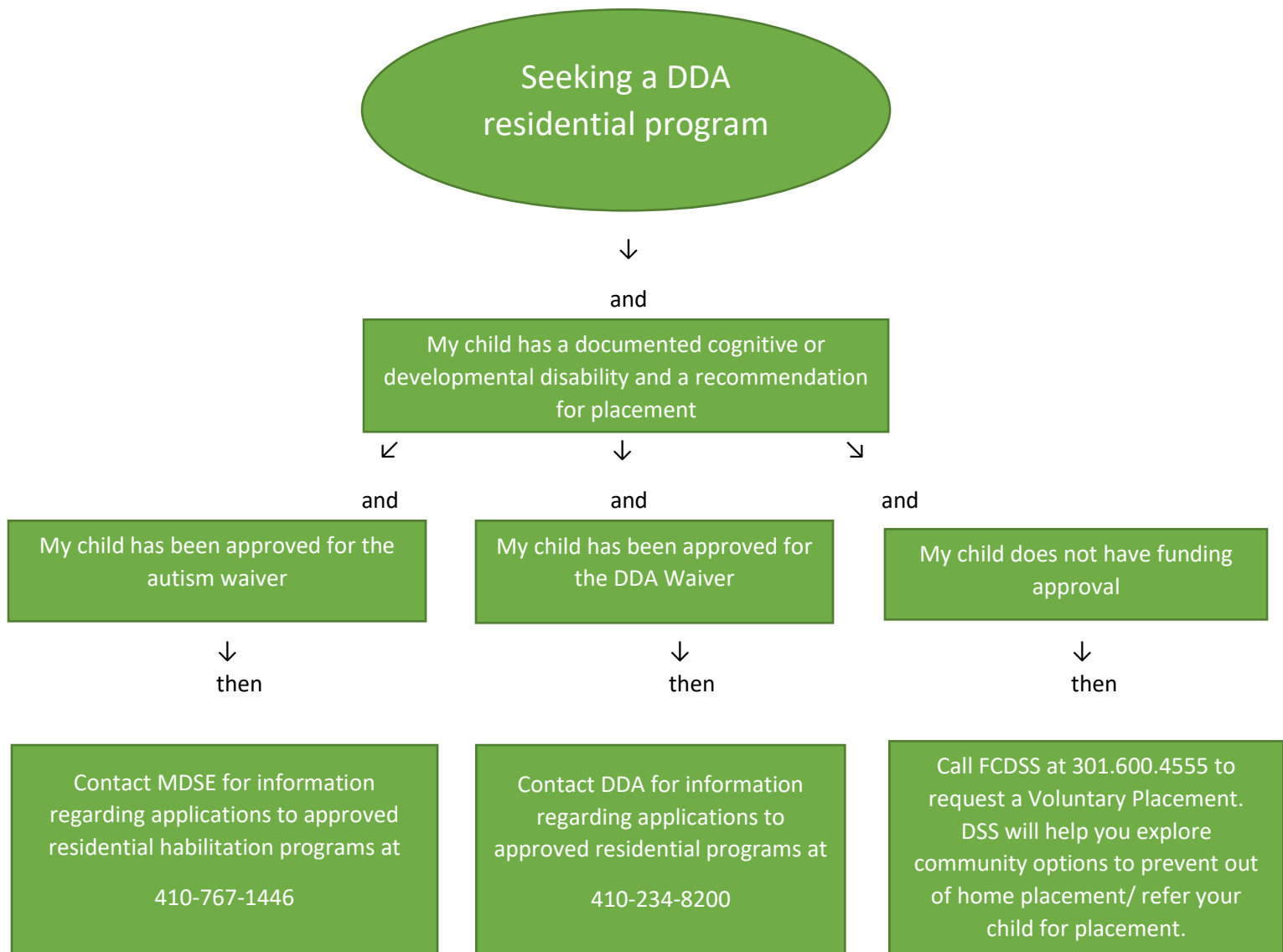
then

Medicaid can still cover the treatment costs. If you need assistance covering the educational costs of the placement, call FCDSS at 301.600.4555 to request a VPA.

**Criteria for each placement Structure under a Voluntary Placement Agreement:**



**Criteria for each placement Structure under a Voluntary Placement Agreement:**



## **DHS/SSA Voluntary Placement Agreement Frequently Asked Questions**

### **When is a Children with Disabilities Voluntary Placement Agreement request deemed appropriate?**

*A parent/legal guardian can request that their child, who has a documented developmental disability and/or mental illness, be voluntarily placed when their clinical treatment needs can no longer be addressed within a community-based setting.*

**Who can make a request for a Voluntary Placement Agreement and how is the process initiated?** *The youth's parent/guardian is the only person who can request the agency's assistance with a VPA. A parent or legal guardian may request a VPA by contacting their LDSS to initiate the request for being considered for a VPA.*

**Who retains custody of the youth while placed under a Voluntary Placement Agreement?** *The parent or legal guardian “always” retains legal custody of the youth. The local involvement is only to assist the family in seeking the necessary treatment needed to ensure the VPA is approved and monitored while the youth is in treatment.*

**What is the protocol for completing the VPA process when the custodial parent doesn't have full legal custody and does not know the whereabouts of the non-custodial parent?** *Make sure that all reasonable efforts have been made in locating the other parent. For example: making sure that letters have been sent to last known addresses, Family Finding services have been utilized, etc.*

**Who is the contact person at SSA when children are denied admission to in-state and out of state facilities?**

**What are the next steps? How do we address the child's on-going need if all in-state and out of state facilities deny admission requests? Is there any way to streamline or shorten the process for out-of-state placements?** *The LDSS should consult the SSA Placement Services Unit using the [PlacementandPermanency@maryland.gov](mailto:PlacementandPermanency@maryland.gov) email for further technical assistance regarding placement options and/or referrals to MDH community resources. The SSA Placement Unit consists of Debra Lynn Pierson, Placement Supervisor and Sheila Garrett, Placement Analyst.*

**What is the next step in the VPA process when there appears to be a lack of in-state capacity?** *The LDSS should seek assistance from the SSA Placement Services Unit using the [PlacementandPermanency@maryland.gov](mailto:PlacementandPermanency@maryland.gov) email for further assistance regarding seeking a possible out of state placement.*

**What is the protocol when a parent requests a VPA but refuses out of state placements and there aren't any in state approvals?** *It is the responsibility of the parent to work with the local department to locate a placement for the youth, therefore if a youth has not received in-state approvals and the parent is not willing to place a youth out of state. The local must work with the family to determine next steps i.e., exploring other community resources. The parent may also decide to withdraw their request for a VPA. The LDSS can also refer the family to the Behavioral Health Administration for further assistance.*

**What is the length of time a Voluntary Placement Agreement may remain in place for a youth?** *For a Children with Disabilities VPA, it is expected that treatment should be completed **within 6 months**. To **extend a VPA beyond the first 180 days**, the LDSS **must** file a court petition to request a hearing in order to obtain a judicial determination that the youth's disability requires additional treatment in an out-of-home placement, and it is in the child's best interest to continue/extend under the VPA.*

**Is a Local Care Team (LCT) approval needed in order to enter into a Voluntary Placement Agreement?** *No, LCT approval is not needed in order to enter into a VPA. The LCT shall be included in the process as they are a valuable resource offered by MDH. Their role is to ensure that all community resources have been fully exhausted.*

**What is the legal protection of a LDSS when there is a letter from a psychiatrist recommending RTC, but the family has not exhausted community support and resources?** *The family should follow the recommendations presented during the Local Care Team meeting. This process will ensure the family has exhausted all possible community resources that the youth may be eligible for. In addition, this is one of the steps outlined in the VPA process.*

**For families with private insurance, what are the appropriate steps to take in order to request a VPA?** *Please advise the family to consult with their individual insurance carrier. In most cases, private insurance must first be exhausted before the family can be considered for a VPA.*

**What types of placements are appropriate when requesting a Voluntary Placement Agreement?** *Residential Treatment Center (RTC), diagnostic facility, or for a youth with a documented developmental disability, a DDA residential program. (Below is a listing of Current SSA Approved In- State VPA Contracted Placements). LDSS staff must use this list when implementing a VPA.*

**While in placement, what are the responsibilities of the parent/legal guardian?** *While a youth is in placement under a Voluntary Placement Agreement, it is the parent/legal guardian's responsibility to engage in treatment with*

*the youth at the facility, pay monthly child support, if applicable, as well as pay for the child's clothing and other necessities. Families shall be involved in all treatment processes while their youth is receiving services under the VPA. The LDSS is available in assisting the family to navigate these services.*

**Who is responsible for child support once the youth enters into a Voluntary Placement Agreement and what additional financial obligations are required?** *A natural or adoptive parent whose rights have not been terminated is responsible for child support. Other financial obligations for the youth may be clothing and supplies school activities, out of pocket medication costs, etc.... for the child. The local department and the local child support office can assess the parent(s) financial ability and make a recommendation to the court specific to the child support obligation. A recommendation to waive child support can be provided. The court has discretion to deviate from the Child Support Guidelines*

**How to overcome challenges with school enrollment when there is push back?** *The LDSS should first consult with the family and assist them in navigating their local educational system. This barrier can also be discussed at the required LCT meeting. In addition, the local may also seek assistance from the SSA Education Specialist, Natalie Miller at [natalie.miller2@maryland.gov](mailto:natalie.miller2@maryland.gov) .*

**Can a child return to the home if there is a recommendation from the LCT for RTC?** *Yes, however the LDSS has the responsibility of ensuring the family has all information, support, and resources in order to make a decision regarding their youth's safety. The family is the final decision maker in the decision regarding the placement of their youth. However, LDSS staff should consult with their LDSS leadership team and legal counsel regarding possible options and further assistance.*

**What training on VPA is available for all staff?** *Staff should refer to their LDSS VPA contact regarding any questions and/or the process. Staff can also utilize this VPA Frequently Asked Question document as a reference guide. In addition, the LDSS can contact their local VPA coordinators. If further assistance is needed, please contact the SSA Permanency Support Team for further assistance: SSA Support Analyst, Natasha Rhoden [natashia.rhoden2@maryland.gov](mailto:natashia.rhoden2@maryland.gov) and/or SSA Permanency Supervisor, Fadea Hussain at [fadea.hussain2@maryland.gov](mailto:fadea.hussain2@maryland.gov). Additionally, the Annual VPA summit is a resource which is posted on knowledge base.*

**Who makes the final decision regarding a Voluntary Placement Agreement when the parent no longer wants to pursue however the current guardian deems it appropriate?** *Priority should always be given, when*

*appropriate to whomever has legal guardianship granted by the courts via a written court order. However, parents are encouraged to remain engaged in the process when they are not the legal guardian.*

**Does requesting a VPA impact GAP/adoption subsidy or any other income (i.e., disability) that is received by the family?** *A VPA can impact GAP/Adoption Subsidy or other income (i.e., disability) in some cases. Please refer to VPA policy SSA-CW # 22-01 referenced during this summit as well as the current SSA Adoption Assistance Policy, SSA Policy Directive #13-01 and the SSA Guardianship Assistance Policy, SSA Policy Directive#13-25.*

**What are the next steps when a family has not been able to find an appropriate placement for their child, the family is unable to care for the child and the child is ready for discharge from their local hospital?** *The family shall work with the Hospital to identify an appropriate placement. The Hospital Social Worker shall contact the Local Care Team. The LCT shall convene to discuss services that can be provided in compliance with the Children's Cabinet LCT Directive 3. The VPA is the last resort. If the VPA is identified as the necessary resource to assist the family, the LDSS should contact the Placement Services Team via email at [PlacementandPermenancy@maryland.gov](mailto:PlacementandPermenancy@maryland.gov)*

**What is the difference between a Time-Limited VPA and a Children with Disabilities VPA?** *A **Time-Limited VPA**, #04-05, is used by a parent/legal guardian who needs temporary care for a child because of a youth's hospitalization, incarceration, or a brief circumstance. When seeking a Time-Limited VPA, please contact your local VPA Coordinator for technical assistance as SSA approval is not required. The time limited placement agreement document should be utilized as this agreement is only for 180 days.*

*In contrast, for the **Children with Disabilities VPA**, #22-01, SSA approval is needed. This process is to be used when a child, who has a documented developmental disability or mental illness, needs placement due to their treatment needs not being met in the community.*



**Current SSA Approved In- State VPA Contracted Placements:**

***Approved Residential Treatment Centers:***

Nexus Woodbourne Family Healing (Formally Woodbourne RTC)

St. Vincent Villa Maria (ages 5-14)

RICA Rockville

RICA Baltimore

Sheppard Pratt

***Approved Diagnostic Centers:***

The Children's Home (Female Youth Only)

St. Vincent Villa Maria (ages 5-14)

Nexus Woodbourne Family Healing **(DETP Sex Trafficking-only)**

***Approved DDA group homes only:***

Shorehaven, Inc.

Center for Social Change, Inc.

Jumoke Community Based Care, Inc.

Community Options

Creative Options

Second Family, Inc.

The Benedictine School

Innovative Services Inc.

The Linwood Center

Maddie's Place

**(Updated 12/09/21)**

## Additional Resources

MSDE Maryland Autism Waiver:

<https://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Pages/Special-Education/autismfactsheet.aspx>

DDA's Low Intensity Support Services (LISS) <https://health.maryland.gov/dda/Pages/liss.aspx>

DDA Medicaid Waiver Program

[https://health.maryland.gov/dda/Pages/Medicaid\\_Waiver\\_Programs.aspx](https://health.maryland.gov/dda/Pages/Medicaid_Waiver_Programs.aspx)

Autism Waiver Fact Sheet

<https://health.maryland.gov/mmcp/longtermcare/SiteAssets/SitePages/Home/Autism%20Waiver%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20001.18.pdf>

Maryland Certified Treatment Facilities per County

<https://health.maryland.gov/bha/Documents/Maryland%20Certified%20Treatment%20Locator%20complete%20listing.pdf>